

POLICY BULLETIN CHILD NUTRITION PROGRAMS

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SUBJECT: Operation of Child Nutrition Programs during a Pandemic

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As a result of the activities being taken to plan a government-wide response to a potential outbreak of pandemic disease, questions have been received regarding the Child Nutrition Programs' operation during such an event.

The Child Nutrition Programs are designed to support institutional feeding operations. The authorizing statutes assume that programs will operate in a congregate setting, whether in schools or child care facilities. During the outbreak of pandemic disease, public health officials anticipate the need for "social distancing" as a means of minimizing the spread of illness by limiting person-to-person contact. Thus, when social distancing measures are in effect, schools and other facilities may be closed, and operation of the Child Nutrition Programs will probably not be possible.

School facilities and equipment normally used in the operation of the National School Lunch Program (NSLP) or the School Breakfast Program (SBP) may be used for other activities during a pandemic outbreak. In addition, in a Presidentially-declared disaster, Program commodities and other foods would be available for distribution to community groups or public agencies. However, although school facilities or commodities could be used, their use would not be related to the NSLP or SBP.

Finally, depending on the nature and scope of the outbreak, the Agency may waive some Program requirements in areas adjacent to, but not directly affected by, a pandemic outbreak. Provisions relating to operational procedures, review requirements, or meal patterns have been waived, either on a short-term or a longer-term basis, in previous disasters. The usefulness and applicability of such waivers during a pandemic would, of course, be dependent on the scope of the outbreak and the limitations on person-to-person contact in any given area.